

# 7 Tips for Having Meaningful relationship



Every conversation is an opportunity to cultivate real, human connections—whether that’s by nurturing existing relationships or creating new ones. With the difficulty of the year we put behind us and the uncertainty of the year ahead, having meaningful conversations can help us process and learn from our individual experiences, together.

Still, it can be hard to go beyond the standard, “How are you?” Often, “How are you?” can feel like an overwhelming question. So, we say, “Good!” or “Hanging in there,” because how we’re really doing either feels like too much to unpack or too heavy to share with someone else.

It can be even harder when the person we’re talking to has differing opinions on the social and political issues happening around us. Often we find ourselves talking at each other, against each other, or over each other, and not with each other. In these moments, we miss the chance to learn from people who challenge our assumptions; conversations that encourage us to reflect on our existing perceptions, create new ideas and progress mentally. So, why do we have such a hard time having conversations that make us feel more connected, fulfilled, and—ultimately—happier?

It’s helpful to think of conversations as a microcosm of a relationship. There needs to be a give and take in the sense that both parties are teaching and learning, talking, and listening. And like a relationship, a good conversation creates an environment where both people feel respected and safe to voice their thoughts. This trust establishes a strong foundation for the conversation to build around. The good news is that most people want to connect on a deeper level. Here are a few tips to help you do just that.



## ***1. Start with curiosity***

Whether it's with your friends, family, Bumble date, or Uber driver, every conversation is an invitation to learn something. Curiosity keeps us engaged in the conversation. Not only that, but we learn faster and remember more when we actually want to learn it. It's pretty likely that the person you're talking to knows something you don't, whether it's about an experience you're having, a place you've always wanted to visit, or something they saw on the news. So if you don't know something, ask. If someone mentions something you want to learn more about, ask. If someone has a different opinion than yours, ask questions to help you find out why. Curiosity pushes the conversation beyond surface-level small talk and helps us feel closer to the person with whom we're speaking.

## *2. Avoid self-fulfilling questions*

We tend to ask questions that push our own expectations and bias onto others. When we ask, “Did that make you mad?” or “Were you happy?” we will likely get a “yes” or “no” answer. Instead, asking, “How did that make you feel?” invites the other person to steer the conversation without judgment and to answer without fear of criticism.

Wording questions more open-endedly also encourages the other person to process what they are experiencing and how they are feeling on a deeper level. You can expect to get more complex, surprising, and illuminating answers this way, which helps you better understand and can help the conversation go deeper than a “yes” or a “no.”

## *3. Let go*

Not every thought that drifts into your head needs a mic. Sometimes, it’s better to let thoughts pass without saying them out loud. Don’t stop listening to or interrupt the other person because you want to make sure you don’t forget to share a clever comment or story. Make sure to let the other person fully finish speaking—and if what you wanted to say is no longer relevant or doesn’t contribute to pushing the conversation further, then let it go.

## *4. Practice empathy*

Empathy is the capacity to set aside your own biases and to understand someone else’s feelings based on that person’s own unique experiences, perspective, and frame of mind. In order to empathize, it’s important to acknowledge that we are all biased and that actively working to keep it in check is a lifelong commitment. When listening with empathy, you’re making an active decision to understand someone else’s opinions and values without criticism. This doesn’t mean you have to agree with what they are saying, but you are respecting their right to voice it and be heard.



### **5. Remember: Their struggles are not your own**

If someone is talking about struggling with work, family, a relationship, or anything else, don't use it as an opportunity to talk about that ex you broke up with five years ago. While it may seem like you are comforting someone by sharing your own semi-related story, this can make people feel overlooked and like you have made them struggle about you. Your experience is not the same—it is not about you.

If you have a habit of jumping in with your own story, next time, make a conscious effort to stay quiet until the other person is done talking, and take this time to truly listen. If at this point you still feel like you can shed some insight on their experience, let them know that you went through something similar and leave it up to them to decide if they want to hear your story.

## **6. Be honest**

Speaking your own truth can be hard to do when the other person has differing values and opinions. However, being able to express your authentic opinions and, in turn, have them challenged is where a lot of the learning and growth happens in a deeper conversation. To speak candidly and respectfully, here are some things to keep in mind:

Letting people know that you hear and understand their viewpoints helps assure them that you are coming from a place of honesty and respect.

Don't step onto a soapbox. Speak to people directly and not at them. A good conversation begins and ends on the same level. One opinion is not superior to the other and the goal is to . both grow and learn together

Speak calmly and with purpose. Ask yourself what you are trying to say and what the best way to convey it might be. If you need to take a moment to think about this, pause. Silence during a conversation offers the space to reflect on what's been said and taking the time to be authentic benefits everyone in the conversation. People want to know the real you so that they can show you their real self as well. both grow and learn together

## **7. Be present**

It's easy to let our minds wander during a conversation, whether it's thinking about the million things on your to-do list or that snarky email your boss sent. Yet, if your mind is somewhere else, you won't be fully paying attention to the conversation. Remember that the other person's time is just as valuable as yours and give them your undivided attention. This means more than just tucking your phone away and keeping eye contact. To really listen is a practice in mindfulness:



Don't worry about what you're going to say next. If you're waiting for the other person to stop talking so you can say what you're thinking, you aren't paying attention. Instead, focus on what they are trying to communicate to you and where they are coming from.

React less and reflect more. It's natural to have knee-jerk reactions to things people say. However, in order to fully understand what someone is saying, we need to give them the floor to explain—and sometimes figure out—their thoughts. So before you jump to a conclusion, reflect on why and how that person came to form their values and opinions. And if you don't know, ask questions to help you understand.

In a time when we are more isolated than ever, conversations have the power to remind us that we are seen, heard, and valued. The way we listen and talk to one another can impact how we move forward as both individuals and a community. And when we are present and show up for each other, conversations will be what bring us together when we have fallen apart.

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